

District Impact Study

Assessment and Action regarding COVID-19
in Central Square, Cambridge, MA

March 15, 2020



Central Square
Business Improvement District



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The numbers are clear. 60% of respondents will not survive another eight weeks at this rate. 72% are waiting for more direction from local and state government as to whether to stay open or close. To flatten the curve and protect our local business and arts economy, we must take decisive action and call for the closure of all non-essential businesses. Not only that, immediate financial relief must be made available.



Letter from the Executive Director

March 15, 2020

City and State elected officials:

I write with extreme urgency on behalf of the Central Square Business Improvement District, our city, state, and country at-large. The effects of COVID-19 are wreaking havoc on our local economy. Our businesses owners, arts organizations, and non-profit directors are being asked to make public safety judgement calls, putting themselves, their staff, and future at risk.

In the last 48 hours, we have quantified, as best we can, the damage to-date and anticipated for our district. Of the over 100 constituents I represent, 51 responded to our survey, exhibiting the calm and precision we'll need to chart a course forward.

The numbers are clear. 60% of respondents will not survive another eight weeks at this rate. 72% are waiting for more direction from local and state government as to whether to stay open or close. I just made the difficult decision to suspend services in the district. Our core team, which intimately understands the connectivity of Central Square's social services and the needs of our housing-insecure neighbors, including our Operations Manager and Team Lead, are still on call and ready to mobilize. We are well-equipped to serve in a crisis like this. That said, to flatten the curve and protect our local business and arts economy, we must take decisive action and call for the closure of all non-essential businesses. Not only that, immediate financial relief must be made available. We have included a list of actionable recommendations. In an addendum, you'll also find a rent rebate tax credit, developed in collaboration with regional partners, for the City of Cambridge's immediate consideration.

We have already received numerous requests from neighboring cities and BIDs across the country to use the survey, data points, results, and recommendations we are presenting here to guide their decision-making and aid their lobbying efforts. This is an opportunity to lead at a time when so many are looking for examples to follow.

As the Executive Director of the BID, resident of Cambridge, husband, and father, I implore you to act now.

Thank you for your service,

Michael Monestime



At a Glance

District-Wide Statistics



The heart and soul of Cambridge, Central Square is a historic business district in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Home to mom and pop shops, social services, non-profits, academics, artists, activists, and entrepreneurs, Central's storefronts and street art reflect the diversity of ideas, tastes, and talents of our city.

The Central Square
Business Improvement District



Hospitality Industry
83 Restaurants and Hotels



Arts & Culture
60 Organizations



Retail
86 Businesses



Non-Profit
48 Organizations

Estimated workforce employed
by these types of businesses:

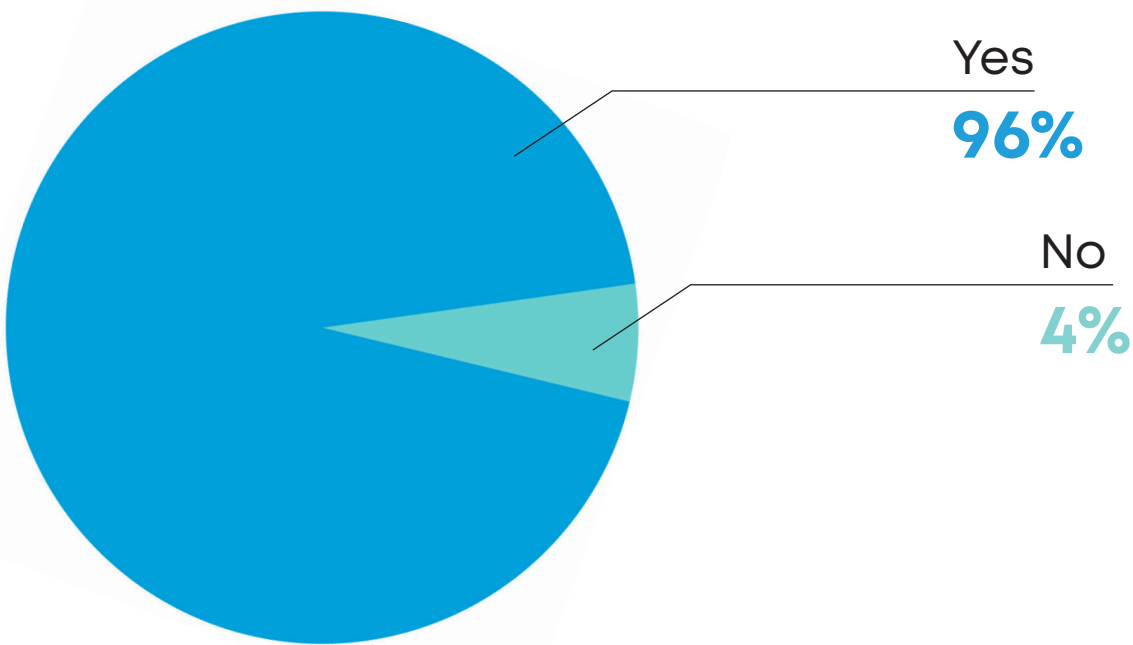
3,000

94%

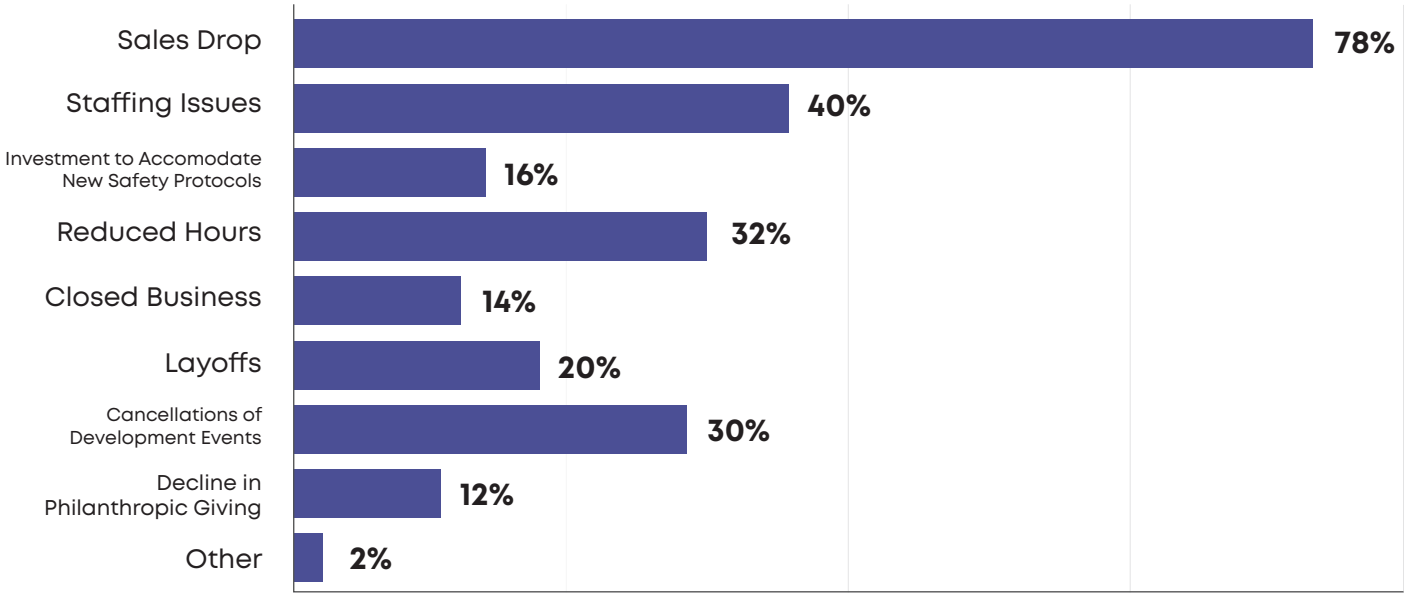
Estimated percentage
of hourly workers

District-Wide Statistics *

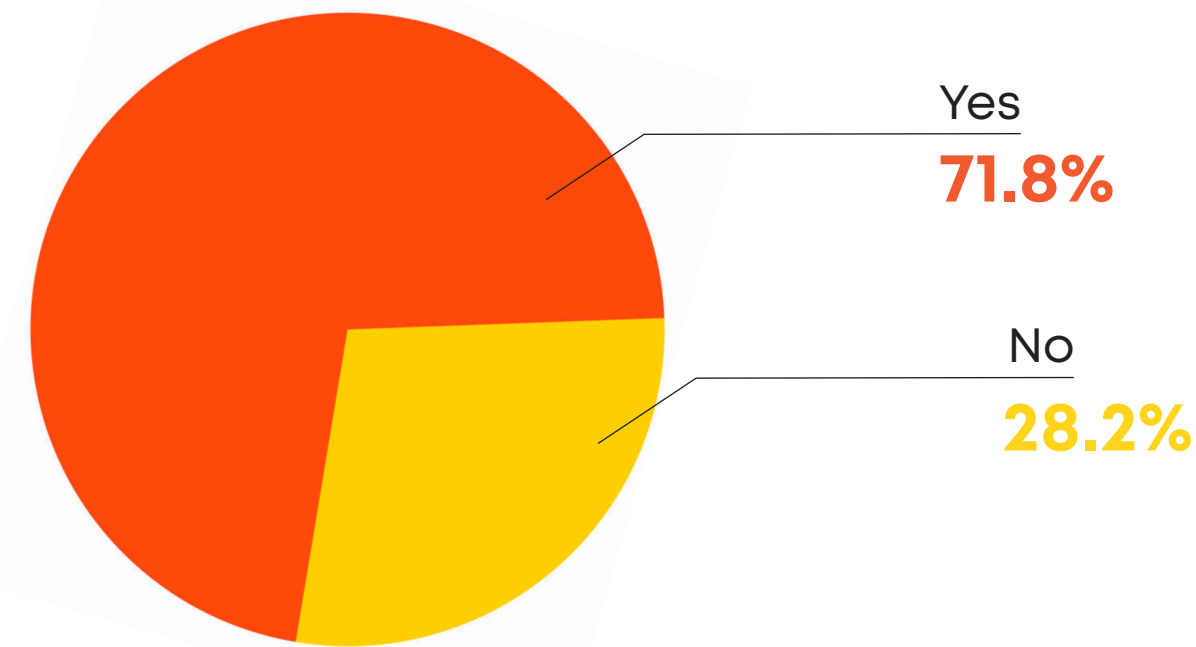
Has your business or organization felt the effects of COVID-19?



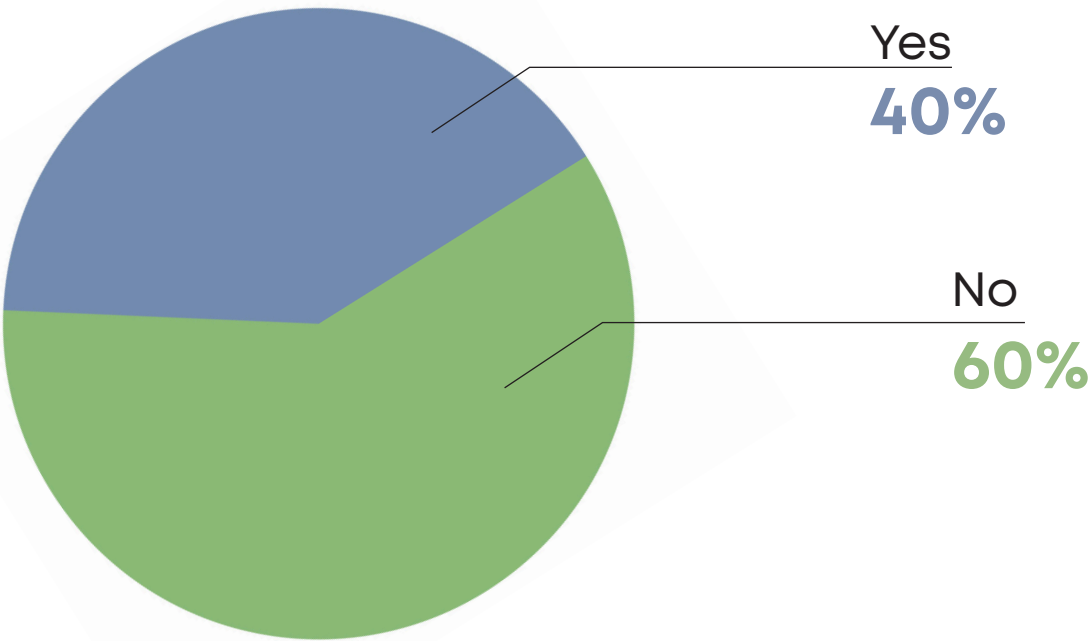
Describe the nature of impact.



Are you waiting on more direction from city or state officials as to whether to close?



At this rate, could your business/organization operate for the duration of the state of emergency, assuming it goes until May?



*Charts show data from 50 Central Square BID respondents, collected between March 13 - March 15, 2020.



Survey Responses



Hospitality

Brookline Lunch

is a mom and pop diner, serving casual Mediterranean and American fare in a cozy, brick-walled cafe.

📍 9 Brookline Street

30

years in
Central Sq.

2

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
sales drop

“ People are **fearful to go out**, so we’ve seen less customers coming in, therefore a **decrease in food sales.** ”

Abeer Abu-Rubieh, family representative

Dunkin’ Donuts

is a long-running chain serving signature donuts, breakfast sandwiches & a variety of coffee drinks.

📍 616 Massachusetts Ave.

40+

years in
Central Sq.

14

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
sales drop

“ The longer this crisis lasts, the greater the probability of restaurant failures or even worse - **bankruptcies.** ”

David Carvalho, owner

730 Tavern

is a one-of-a-kind experience in a friendly and diverse atmosphere. Our guests can look forward to socializing while enjoying good food, drink and the company of neighbors and friends, while celebrating New England's awesome sport teams.

📍 730 Massachusetts Ave.

2.7

years in
Central Sq.

9

hourly
employees

X

nature of impact:
cancellations

Green Street

is a neighborhood fixture, with an award-winning A to Z cocktail menu, meticulously selected wines and craft beers, and a seasonal, local-based menu.

📍 280 Green Street

15

years in
Central Sq.

17

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drop,
staffing**

“ COVID-19 has caused a
loss of 50% of our daily revenue. ”

Davidson Bettero, owner

“ We are seeing a **50-75% drop**
in sales and a drastic change
in **kitchen staff and hours.** ”

Dylan Black, owner

Saloniki Greek

is a tribute to the humble Greek sandwich shop, bringing the flavor and quality of the Greek kitchen to the US,

📍 181 Massachusetts Ave.

2.5

years in
Central Sq.

35

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drop, staffing,
reduced hours, layoffs**

“ It’s not a snowstorm, it’s not some event that can be “stopped,” we don’t know when it will be over. **It’s paralyzing.** ”

Jonathan Mendez, owner

Abide

serves inventive, handcrafted coffee & tea drinks with varied toppings in a cheerful space.

📍 317 Massachusetts Ave.

3

years in
Central Sq.

9

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**closed business, sales
drop, cancellations**

“ Small businesses like ours with thin margins and little to no access to cash reserves **will surely die.** ”

Jeffrey Yu, owner

Craigie on Main

combines French-inspired nose-to-tail refined rusticity with no exceptions local, seasonal & organic ingredients.

📍 853 Main Street

12
years in
Central Sq.

45
hourly
employees

📉
nature of impact:
**sales drops, staffing,
safety investments,
reduced hours, layoffs**

“ People are staying home and not going out. **The impact is obvious and real.** ”

Tony Maws, owner

PAGU

is a Japanese tapas restaurant located in Cambridge creating globally inspired homey food that speaks to the body and the soul.

📍 310 Massachusetts Ave.

3
years in
Central Sq.

30
hourly
employees

📉
nature of impact:
**sales drop,
cancellations**

“ If we close, how may we **take care of our employees?** ”

Tracy Chang, owner

The Phoenix Landing

is part pub, part dance club. This multitasker offers modern Irish pub fare, DJs, and trivia night.

📍 512 Massachusetts Ave.

25

years in
Central Sq.

16

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops, staffing,
reduced hours, layoffs,
cancellations**

La Fábrica Central

is a Latin Caribbean Cuisine restaurant, with nightclub open on the weekends with authentic Caribbean nightlife and live music right in downtown Cambridge.

📍 450 Massachusetts Ave.

3

years in
Central Sq.

60

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops,
reduced hours,
layoffs, cancellations**

“ COVID-19’s effects on Central Square is a **disaster**. ”

Kevin Treanor, owner

“ Our business will not sustain a slowdown of **more than two months** without emergency loan relief. ”

Dennis Benzan, owner

Veggie Galaxy

is a contemporary vegetarian diner and vegan bakery.

📍 450 Massachusetts Ave.

9

years in
Central Sq.

51

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops, staffing,
safety investments**

“

We are dealing with this
hour by hour.

”

Adam Penn, owner

Mariposa Bakery

is a quaint, brick-walled bakery serving homemade goodies,
sandwiches & espresso drinks.

📍 424 Massachusetts Ave.

16

years in
Central Sq.

13

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops,
reduced hours,
cancellation of local
farmer's market**

“

This is usually a bustling thriving
community and we are seeing a
drastic reduction in people.

”

Suzanne Mermelstein, owner

Darwin's Ltd.

is a sandwich shop focused on coffee, sandwiches, and community.
📍 313 Massachusetts Ave.

28
years in
Central Sq.

24
hourly
employees

📉
nature of impact:
**sales drops, layoffs,
reduced hours**

“ My staff need a streamlined way to get money fast from the state... **A delay is not acceptable when they have rent to pay.** ”

Steven Darwin, owner

907 Main

is a boutique hotel experience with onsite restaurant & rooftop bar on Central Square in Cambridge, MA.
📍 907 Main St.

1
years in
Central Sq.

40
hourly
employees

📉
nature of impact:
**impact pending
come opening in May**

“ COVID-19 has possibly impacted us for a May opening. ”

Kathryn Vallier, manager

Mâe Asian Eatery

ia a creative spin on authentic Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese dishes using recipes Chef Yuri Asawasittikit’s mother has shared with her.

781 Main Street

1

years in Central Sq.

4

hourly employees



nature of impact:
sales drop, staffing issues, reduced hours, cancellations of catering orders

“ Our customer base consists of dine-in and dine out, and **we are getting hit on both fronts**. People are working remotely and/or leaving the state. ”

Anil Rayasam, owner

The Middle East Restaurant

consists of three live-music performance rooms, two family-style restaurants with full-service bars, and an elegant restaurant named ZuZu.

472-480 Massachusetts Ave.

45

years in Central Sq.

90

hourly employees



nature of impact:
sales drop, staffing, closed for business

“ We had to **close the business** because of COVID-19. ”

Nabil Sater, owner

Little Donkey

is a global tapas restaurant in the heart of Central Square Cambridge.
📍 505 Massachusetts Ave.

3.5

years in Central Sq.

65

hourly employees



nature of impact:
sales drops, staffing, reduced hours, layoffs, cancellations of development events

Naco Taco

is a full-service taqueria in Central Square, featuring scratch made tacos and tortas in a casual setting, along with margaritas and cocktails, craft beer and wine.
📍 297 Massachusetts Ave.

5

years in Central Sq.

55

hourly employees



nature of impact:
sales drop, staffing, layoffs, reduced hours, expected closure

“

We’ve seen a **40% drop** in dinner reservations and **85% drop** in lunch sales **because of COVID-19.**

”

Jamie Bissonette, co-owner

“

The effects of COVID-19 have been **devastating.**

”

Alex Tannenbaum, founder

Harding House

is a warm and homey bed and breakfast in Cambridge.

📍 288 Harvard Street

23

years in
Central Sq.

10

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
sales drops

Dana Hill Liquors

is a package store in the Harvard/Central Square area.
Cambridge, MA.

📍 910 Massachusetts Ave.

3+

years in
Central Sq.

6

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops,
cancellations**

“ In hospitality we need
travelers to visit and the
work is very much **in person.** ”

Briana Pearson, owner

“ Decline to almost
\$0 in corporate business. ”

Charles Marquardt, owner

Viale

features seasonal dishes and a rotating wine list.

📍 502 Massachusetts Ave.

5.5

years in
Central Sq.

27

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops,
reduced hours,
loss of future events**

“

Decline in guests by
20% the last couple days,
expecting a
70% drop next week.

”

Mark Young, owner

The Mad Monkfish

is passionate about ethnic flavors & jazz. They offer a unique
take on sushi & Asian specialties.

📍 524 Massachusetts Ave.

9

years in
Central Sq.

32

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops,
reduced hours,
cancellations**

“

The entire square **looks
empty**, and our business
has been **cut by 75%.**

”

Jamme Chantler, owner

1369 Coffeehouse

offers the best coffees, teas, pastries, and accompaniments, and strive to serve them in a friendly, warm atmosphere.

757 Massachusetts Ave.

25

years in
Central Sq.

29

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
sales drops,
staffing issues,
reduced hours



“ Our greatest concern is
for our staff, who **need**
paychecks to survive. ”

Joshua Gerber, owner



Survey Responses



Arts & Culture

The Studio at 550

is an artist exchange center designed to promote cross disciplinary exchange through classes, workshops, professional development events, networking events, performances, and opportunities through programming and space rental.

📍 550 Massachusetts Ave.

4

years in
Central Sq.

0

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
closed business

Cambridge Community Television

provides media production and computer training and access to production equipment and facilities to residents, non-profits and businesses.

📍 438 Massachusetts Ave.

32

years in
Central Sq.

5

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
closed business

“ Due to the nature of the business combined with a 1 person on staff to man the extensive cleaning protocol, we will choose to suspend operations for the **health protection of the community.** ”

Callie Chapman, owner

“ I fear the **loss of small businesses** that run on a shoestring in the best of times. ”

Susan Fleischmann, owner

Red Fox Escapes

is an Escape Room in Cambridge MA with 100% original puzzles and movie-quality sets.

📍 614 Massachusetts Ave.

1

years in
Central Sq.

0

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops, layoffs,
and cancellations**

Central Square Theater

the collaboration between two non-profit professional theater companies with a combined track record of over 50 years of excellence in producing theater and educational programming for the Greater Boston community.

📍 450 Massachusetts Ave.

12

years in
Central Sq.

30

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**closed business,
sales drop, staffing,
cancellations, declines
in philanthropic giving**

“ COVID-19 is **catastrophic for our business** today. We’ve only just paid off our build-out costs, and **have no cushion** to weather months of zero revenues. ”

Marie Huber, owner

“ **Cultural organizations are critical to the lifeblood of Central Square.** Please don’t let this health scare put those organizations out of business. ”

Catherine Carr Kelly, owner

The Dance Complex

is a volunteer based, artist run organization dedicated to promoting, advancing, and sponsoring artistic endeavors, creative work and education in dance and the movement arts.

📍 536 Massachusetts Ave.

28

years in
Central Sq.

9

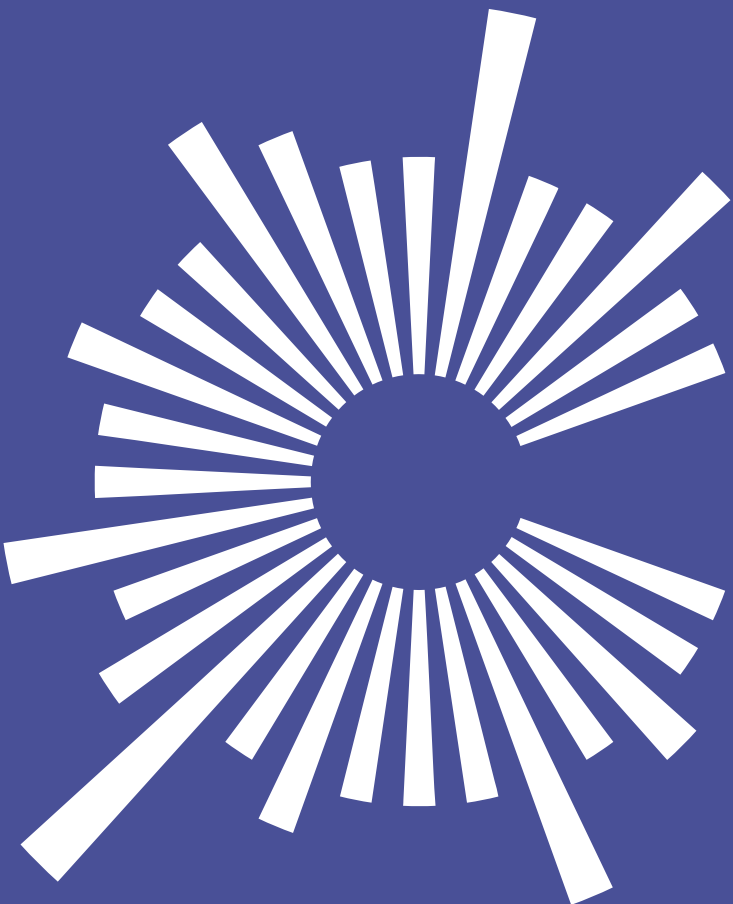
hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drops, layoffs,
and cancellations**

“ With Covid-19 and a minimum of four weeks away from business, **we are at risk to exist.** ”

Peter DiMuro, owner





Survey Responses



Retail

HMart

is an Asian grocery store chain supplying imported packaged foods & housewares plus ready-to-serve meals.

📍 581 Massachusetts Ave.

6

years in
Central Sq.

59

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**increased panic
purchasing**

Great Eastern Trading Co.

is a unique and magical shopping experience and personal styling for special occasions or everyday wear.

📍 49 River Street

50

years in
Central Sq.

4

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
sales drop

“ We don’t know when/if we will be
closed down due to quarantine. ”

Will Wood, owner

“ The impact is palpable.
I fear for my business’s future. ”

Nephtaliem McCrary, owner

Target

is a retail chain offering home goods, clothing, electronics and more, plus exclusive designer collections.

📍 564 Massachusetts Ave.

3

years in
Central Sq.

60

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
staffing issues,
safety investments

Lucky's Tattoo & Piercing

is a custom body art studio with locations in Northampton and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

📍 694 Massachusetts Ave.

2

years in
Central Sq.

5

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
cancellations,
safety investments

“ Sales are clearly **not sustainable** and will dip significantly in the coming days. ”

Danielle Morine, owner

“ **The situation can so rapidly evolve.** If we have to shut down, things will look very different for us. ”

Zach Torrin, owner

University Stationery

is a Veteran, family-owned stationery store stocking office supplies, rubber stamps & novelties.

📍 296 Massachusetts Ave.

90

years in
Central Sq.

0

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
sales drop

Teddy Shoes

is a family-owned shoe store that specializes in dance shoes and apparel, family footwear, wide widths, boots, hats, dyeables, lingerie, high heels and large sizes.

📍 548 Massachusetts Ave.

63

years in
Central Sq.

3

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drop,
reduced staffing**

“ COVID-19 has caused a
80% revenue drop to date. ”

Gail Seidman, owner

“ **The dropoff is alarming.** We can’t
stay in business if no one comes in. ”

Steve Adelson, owner

Cheapo Records

is a Veteran music store stocking a vast range of used vinyl, cassettes & CDs in an array of genres.

📍 538 Massachusetts Ave.

43

years in
Central Sq.

3

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drop, staffing,
cancellations**

Heartbreak Hill Running Company

is your headquarters for all things running: personalized gait analysis shoe fittings, the best apparel and accessories, expert coaching, proven programming, and a state-of-the-art treadmill studio.

📍 294 Massachusetts Ave.

10

years in
Central Sq.

28

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**closed business,
sales drop, staffing,
cancellations, reduced hours**

“ A low interest loan could make the difference in **our survival.** ”

Robert Perry, owner

“ We are heavily dependent on the Boston Marathon, runners and events. I estimate **\$200,000 to \$300,000 in loss.** ”

Justin Burdon, owner

Central Square Florist

is a trusted and family-owned local florist, delivering flowers and gifts to Boston and surrounding areas.

📍 653 Massachusetts Ave.

91

years in Central Sq.

18

hourly employees



nature of impact:
sales drop, cancellations of development events

“ COVID-19 has directly affected us in the **cancellation of corporate and social events.** ”

Jackie Levine, owner

Classic Graphx

offers a full design service, offset printing, on demand digital printing, digital copying, cutting, folding, bookletmaking, padding, bindery.

📍 678 Massachusetts Ave.

35

years in Central Sq.

7

hourly employees



nature of impact:
sales drop, staffing, reduced hours

“ We will all be **adversely impacted** by this. ”

Anne Shuhler, owner

Seven Stars

is a metaphysical bookstore, specializing in Religious traditions and New Age Material.

731 Massachusetts Ave.

30

years in Central Sq.

5

hourly employees



nature of impact:
sales drop

Revolutionary Clinics

is a medical marijuana experience.

541 Massachusetts Ave.

1

years in Central Sq.

20

hourly employees



nature of impact:
staffing issues, cancellations of development events

“ We’ve seen **fewer customers** and tighter disposable income. ”

Stuart Weinberg, owner

“ We’ve seen **fewer customers** and a shortage of product. ”

Keith Cooper, owner

Hilton's Tent City

is New England's number one source for outdoor gear and apparel, serving Cambridge since 1947.

📍 565 Massachusetts Ave.

50

years in
Central Sq.

4

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drop,
staffing issues**

POP! Central

is a pop-up shop feat. vintage fashion, streetwear, music and art.

📍 596 Massachusetts Ave.

>1

years in
Central Sq.

3

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
**sales drop,
staffing issues,
layoffs**

“ 100% drop in foot traffic. ”

David Kramer, owner

“ We're experiencing a **massive drop in sales volume**; could make or break the company. ”

Robert Perry, owner

Blick Art Materials

is a chain stocking an extensive selection of art supplies, including sketchbooks, paints & canvases.

📍 619 Massachusetts Ave.

10

years in
Central Sq.

17

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
staffing issues,
cancellations of
development events



“

Student sales have
dropped off completely.

”

Meg Nichols, manager



Survey Responses



Non-Profit

Food For Free

rescues fresh food—food that might otherwise go to waste—and distributes it within the local emergency food system where it can reach those in need.

📍 11 Inman Street

39

years in
Central Sq.

14

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
safety investment,
increased investment to
support families in need

Cambridge YMCA

is a family facility that has many things to offer the Cambridge Community.

📍 820 Massachusetts Ave.

155

years in
Central Sq.

82

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
sales drop

“ People want to **DO something.** ”

Sasha Purpura, owner

“ Members [are] **canceling memberships** and putting them on hold. ”

Nancy O’Brien, manager

Cambridge Community Center

promotes community cooperation and unity to empower youth, individuals, and families by offering social, cultural, educational, and recreational activities such as our comprehensive out-of-school time program, winter farmers market, public gallery, and meeting spaces.

📍 5 Callender Street

91

years in
Central Sq.

16

hourly
employees



nature of impact:
closed business,
reduced hours



“ We had to make the difficult decision to **suspend all regular operations.** We are concerned about the well-being of the children and families we serve, our senior community members, and our staff. ”

Darrin Korte, owner

Emergency Relief Recommendations

In order for our local business and arts economy to recover from this crisis,
we need relief and resources now.



1. Call for immediate closure of non-essential businesses
2. Adopt Rent Relief Tax Credit program
3. Waive Meals and Sales Tax
4. Institute anti-eviction protections, commercial and residential
5. Avail more relief funds and resources to focus on protecting our most vulnerable neighbors
6. Establish emergency fund for employees affected by closures:
 - Waiver on earnings related to crisis response for the unemployed
 - Liquidate Participatory Budgeting and use funds to provide immediate temporary assistance to the newly unemployed
7. Offer mortgage relief for property owners who can't make payments either through a city-backed guarantee or bond
8. Establish centralized food delivery for seniors with local partners in hospitality industry
9. Call on us for help. We can help inform, disseminate, and carry out new procedures and relief programs.

If this report and associated survey can be of service to your community, please reach out to:

Nina Berg
Communications and Creative Director
nina@centralsq.org
617.945.2184

For up-to-the-minute updates regarding COVID-19 in Cambridge, please refer to the city's dedicated online resource:

<http://www.cambridgema.gov/covid19>



Central Square
Business Improvement District